

THE START OF OUR JOURNEY

BY TEULU TRIBE (BECKA AND ZACH)

First of all, hello! We are Becka and Zach, a couple who saved with all their might for three years whilst living in Swansea, Wales, to finally buy their 1987 Colvic Victor 40 sailboat. Upon buying our boat, named Teulu (it's a Welsh word- pronounced Tay-lee), we bunkered down in Plymouth in order to get her up to a liveaboard, around the world standard vessel.

They say that if you wait until your boat is 100% ready, you will never leave, and as we neared our departure date back in September, we felt that through and through. Our mizzen mast had only just been craned back on, solar panels, batteries, VHF aerials fitted and life raft back from service. That week was all go! But, on that day, we let the lines off and as we sailed out of the Plymouth sound, all the angst, worry and doubt of our readiness just drifted away with the swell passing under our hull.

It's a pretty long story but the first trip out of Plymouth stayed just that, a trip out of Plymouth and back into a cosy anchorage in the Helford River near Falmouth. We were novices in weather planning and unfortunately for us, the gale that hit the Scillies head on, also hit us dead on the bow. Think breaking waves at all angles and 32 knots of wind. It wasn't ideal, so turning back was the best decision for us in that moment. A few weeks later, with fresh minds and after a tonne of planning this time, we set off on our passage across the English Channel. The next morning, we arrived (actually too early!) at the entrance to the Channel du Four. This stretch of water was renowned for its multiple rocks, gushing currents and countless navigational markers so required meticulous planning and a good set of binoculars! A couple of hours later, we had flown down the channel, hitting 10 knots at times (the tide was 5 knots- but we will ignore that!). We cruised into Brest feeling incredibly proud that we had accomplished that section of water



However, it was a 'no rest for the wicked' moment, as after a trip to the customs office and a good nights sleep, we cracked on with boat jobs. On the channel crossing, we had noticed a section of wear in our port side genoa sheet so we hired some bikes and cycled to the chandlery to buy a new one and then popped to a supermarket to resupply our cupboards. A quick stop at the marina office to use their WIFI to check the weather, changed all of our plans as there was a gap in the weather to cross the Bay of Biscay.



However, we had to be quick as a large system was rolling in. 'We leave today at 3pm' we exclaimed, suddenly rather flustered at the prospect of leaving again after just arriving less than 24 hours prior! But, after finishing all our jobs and having a coffee (or two), we let go of the marina lines in Brest and set out on the first section of the Bay of Biscay crossing- the Raz du Sein.

This was a similar stretch of water to Channel du Four with the number of cardinal markers (these mark danger), rocks and extreme currents. But, having now had a 'practice' section the day before, we felt dab hands at it and we sailed happily down the fast section of water between the mainland and the tiny Ile de Sein island.

The first night was beautiful. We had a full moon, our whisker pole was out and our Kemp sails were full. There was a steady 15 knots of wind with small rolling waves. We read our books, listened to podcasts and by the time we knew it, it was the morning.

On this day, the weather picked up a little and the wind went from 15 knots, to 25 knots by 8pm in the evening. We reefed early, just after dinner and prepared ourselves, and Teulu, for the roly night. With 1.7m waves every 6.8 seconds, our autopilot was struggling to keep up and we ended up hand steering a good amount of the night. Combined with the sound of our free-spinning prop (we have a hydraulic gearbox so this is our norm) it was hard



to switch off and get any rest. A combination of seeing other boats fly along at 20 knots and the wind shifting resulting in us having to change course and head more towards Santander, it was a rather intense night and I think Zach would agree that we were both relieved to see the sun rise the following morning.

The sun showing its face and the water transforming from a medium grey to a rich blue, lifted our spirits and around 7pm the following day, we spotted land. Although the crossing had not been long, nor too strenuous, it was the most surreal and fulfilling moment when we realised we had successfully sailed our own boat from France to Spain, across one of the most dangerous sections of water in the world.

However, we weren't out of the woods yet. When we were 20 miles offshore, with the glimmer of lights guiding us in, the weather took a turn for the worse. We had heard the gusts really pick up along the Northern Spanish coast so we reefed early but we were still incredibly heeled over when they hit. The seas were confused and we were being flung about as we approached Gijón. The heavy rain bought a lot of haze and turning into wind to drop our sails, felt like we were participating in a rodeo! However, with the motor on, we passed through the breakwater into the marina and tied the lines on.

Accompanied by loud music from a nearby nightclub, Zach and I stood on the pontoon, in awe (or shock?) that we had another 300 miles under our belt and a new country to explore.